



## **Appropriations Committee**

**March 11, 2010**

Testimony of the American Cancer Society

### **Opposition to March 1, 2010 Deficit Mitigation Proposed \$5 Million Tobacco & Health Trust Fund Sweep**

The American Cancer Society **STRONGLY OPPOSES** any further transfers of money from the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund (THTF) into the General Fund.

Smoking related diseases are the single most preventable cause of death in our society and it is estimated that 4,900 Connecticut residents will die from smoking related illnesses in 2009 alone. Currently, 15.9% of adults in Connecticut and 21% of high school aged kids smoke, spending on average \$1825 per year on the habit. Connecticut incurs \$1.63 billion in annual health care costs and another \$1 billion in lost productivity directly caused by tobacco.

Connecticut receives over \$500 million annually between the MSA funds and tobacco tax revenue, including an annual \$12 million deposit in the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund. Over the years, however, less than 2% of the cumulative total has been spent in support of smoking cessation services. In 2008 Connecticut spent \$0 dollars and was ranked last, 51 out of 50 states and Washington D.C. in allocating funds to tobacco cessation programs. While the state did not spend any money, the annual health care costs associated with tobacco use continued to increase.

70% of Connecticut's smokers indicate they want to quit while 40% attempt to quit each year, however only about 5% are successful. Many fail because, in part, of a lack of access to successful cessation programs. Funding prevention programs that alleviate this burden on our citizens and economy is not only consistent with our shared goal of insuring access to care to those in need, it is also the only fiscally responsible approach we can take.

From a cost perspective, the need is critical. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, tobacco use costs Medicaid alone in Connecticut over \$507 million per year, costs borne primarily by Connecticut taxpayers for entirely preventable diseases.

The past two years has seen a notable increase in spending on tobacco prevention and cessation, primarily through the efforts of the Tobacco & Health Trust Fund Board and the members of the Appropriations and Public Health committees who have allocated close to \$13 million dollars from the last two deposits to the fund for such purposes. This spending has resulted in the state quitline being able to offer NRT therapies, the creation of a countermarketing campaign, school based prevention programs, community based cessation services and more.

All of that progress is a result of funding being allocated by the Trust Fund Board with legislative approval. All of that progress will come to a halt next year should the fund be swept.

Providing tobacco users with access to comprehensive cessation services increases quit rates by up to 40%. Tobacco prevention and cessation programs are shown over and over to be effective ways of reducing the financial and human costs of tobacco. In fact, these services, ranked among the top two preventative health services in a systematic assessment of 30 services.

The good news is that we always have a choice. The Master Settlement payments and tobacco taxes can still be used to support smoking cessation efforts in Connecticut. With a renewed and committed investment in aggressive tobacco control, we can reverse the damage already done, and impact the health and lives of the people of Connecticut.

As these deficit and budget revision negotiations continue, the American Cancer Society stands ready and willing to work with members of the Appropriations Committee and other members of the Legislature and the Administration to effectively establish coherent strategy which adequately addresses these and other health care related concerns. Cutting or transferring these funds now will only temporarily solve a very small portion of the current deficit while doing nothing to address an entirely preventable problem. This in turn will only escalate the current economic downturn and result in a greater number of lives being affected by cancer at a greater cost to the state.

We respectfully request your opposition to the fund sweep of the Tobacco and Health Trust Fund and instead support utilizing those funds as they were intended—for tobacco related prevention and cessation programs and services.

###